

7/06/2009 This Week in Congress

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July 6, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." In observance of the July 4th holiday, Congress did not meet this week, which allowed me to be in Kansas. I continued my 13th annual Big First Listening Tour: "From Washington to Home" this week with stops in Wallace, Logan and Wabaunsee Counties. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Celebrating 233 Years of American Independence and Freedom

This week, I celebrated Independence Day with Kansans at community events across our state. The 4th of July reminds me of the many things we have to be thankful for in America-most important of which is the men and women who have fought and serve today in dangerous places around the world to protect our freedom.

Independence Day Picnic in Clay Center: On Thursday evening, I attended an early July 4th celebration at a neighborhood picnic in Clay Center at the home of State Representative Vern and Susie Swanson. Thanks to former Clay County Magistrate Judge Ruth Browne for inviting me to attend.

Patriots Parade in Hutchinson: I began Independence Day by participating in the Patriots Parade in Hutchinson Saturday morning. Joe Engle, an astronaut from Chapman, served as the parade's Grand Marshal. Thanks to Olen Mitchell for driving me in the parade.

Community Celebration in Sterling: Also on Saturday, I joined residents of Sterling at an Independence Day celebration at City Park. It was good to see familiar faces and visit with folks on the holiday.

Independence Day Parade in Wamego: Later on Saturday, I was in Wamego where I joined members of the community at Wamego's 138th annual Independence Day Parade. The parade is the longest running Independence Day parade in Kansas. Thanks to Kourtney Brase for inviting me to participate in the parade.

Fourth of July Fireworks in Hays: On Sunday, my family and I attended a concert and fireworks display at old Fort Hays in Hays. The fireworks display is one of many events that take place during Wild West Fest, which also included concerts, contests and carnival games. Thanks to all of the sponsors, chairmen and volunteers who helped make the event a success.

Working to Preserve Health Care in Larned

On Sunday, I met with Larned City Manager Don Gaeddert; Larned Mayor Robert Pivonka; Pawnee County Commissioner Arlis Atteberry; Rita Kurtz; Tom Giessel; Kim Barnes; Chair of the Community Health Organization Harry Zielke; Director of the County Health Department Mary Beth Herrmann; and State Senator Janis Lee to talk about access to health care services for Larned and area residents. Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI), recently announced plans to close the hospital in Larned on September 30, 2009. I am greatly concerned that the closure of the hospital will adversely affect Larned residents' access to critical health care services, especially 24-hour emergency services.

Access to health care is essential for rural communities to survive. I am committed to working with Pawnee County officials and citizens in preserving health care access for area residents and will discuss the proposed closure of St. Joseph Memorial Hospital in Larned when I meet with Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on July 8.

Health Care Reform Must be Transparent and Ensure Access to Quality, Affordable Care

Making sure Kansans have access to quality, affordable health care is one of my top priorities. As Congress begins to consider health care reform, it is critical that the process be transparent so that Americans and Members of Congress fully understand the implications of any proposal. I am troubled that Congress has recently passed rushed and flawed legislation that drastically expands government. Massive spending bills and a national carbon tax have been passed with haste and too little debate. With so much at stake in health care reform, Congress must not rush a bill through just to get something passed. We need to have a true exchange of ideas and a real debate on the different proposals.

This week, I became the first Member of the House of Representatives to sign the Responsible Health Care Reform Pledge. This pledge, sponsored by Let Freedom Ring, an organization dedicated to conservative principles, is a promise made by a Member of Congress to not vote for any health care reform package that the Member has not read and that has not been available to the public on the Internet for at least 72 hours. [Click here to read more about this pledge.](#)

While health care reform must be crafted in a transparent manner, it must also address the present inequity in Medicare reimbursement among states. Currently, many states are delivering cost-effective care but are being penalized by the Medicare reimbursement formula. Kansas is not benefitting from its "high-quality, low-cost" status. I recently requested congressional leaders make addressing Medicare geographic payment inequities a priority. Doing so is essential for health care reform to be successful, to improve patient care and for Medicare to achieve long-term sustainability.

With other members of the Kansas congressional delegation, I recently requested that HHS Secretary Sebelius modify regulations to ensure that hospitals in Onaga and Wamego do not lose their designation as Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs). A proposed rule for Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will recognize Manhattan as a new Metropolitan Statistical Area, which would change the geographic classification for Riley, Geary and Pottawatomie Counties from "rural" to "urban". Because Medicare's payment rules require CAHs to be located in a "rural" area, an indirect effect of this geographic change would force these two hospitals to lose their CAH designation-thus threatening their financial well-being. My appeal to CMS was to allow continued CAH status for these hospitals so that they can continue to provide needed health care services to Kansans.

Visiting Businesses in Osage City

Mussatto Brothers, Inc.: On Friday, I toured the Mussatto Brothers distribution facility in Osage City. Mussatto Brothers is a beverage distributorship employing Kansans in Osage and surrounding counties. As I toured the facility, I had an opportunity to hear about the small business environment the company operates in. During this busy time around the holiday weekend, I am thankful that the employees of Mussatto Brothers took the time to visit with me. Also thank you to Casey Mussatto for inviting me on the tour.

KanBuild, Inc.: KanBuild, a builder of custom design homes, commercial and multi-family buildings, has been a part of Osage City for decades. I visited the facility on Friday and spoke with members of the management team about efforts to improve the new housing market and the need for certainty in the credit market. It was heartening to see a home manufacturer still operating in this difficult housing climate. Thanks to John Samples, Chairman and CEO, for organizing the visit, as well as to the employees who welcomed me.

Burlingame Rotary Club

Also on Friday, I attended the Burlingame Rotary Club and spoke to members about recent activity in Congress, including the cap and tax legislation and health care reform. As a fellow Rotarian, I always enjoy meeting with other Rotarians. Kansans share a desire to make the places we call home better and civic clubs like Rotary help make this happen. I appreciated learning about issues important to folks in Osage County. Thanks to John Fowler of First State Bank for inviting me to speak.

Community Involvement Matters

I recently received the Monarch Chevron Award for being a member of the Hays Lions Club for 25 years. The award recognizes Lions for their long-term service. I have enjoyed being a member of this Hays civic club and recently attended the Lions Club State Convention in Wichita. I joined the Hill City Lions Club before transferring my membership to Hays. Citizen involvement in civic clubs like this helps keep Kansas communities strong. Thank you to all who give back by being involved in their communities.

In the Office

Fred Cholick of Manhattan, who is the Dean of the Kansas State University College of Agriculture, was in to talk about

research opportunities for K-State. Brad Burenheide of Manhattan, Leslie Scoby of Sabetha, Sue Boldra of Hays, Chris Kemp of Wichita, Diane Becker of Norton and Bill Wilson of Tribune were in with the Center for Civic Education to promote civic competence and responsibility among Kansas elementary and secondary students.

AFS-USA Exchange Program students Ahmed Mahmoud from Egypt, Frank Kogbey from Ghana and Fitra Kurniati from Indonesia stopped by my office to tell me about their experience as foreign exchange students living in Kansas. Ahmed lived with a host family in Osborne, Frank studied in Downs and Fitra lived in McPherson.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol this week, including Charlie and Pat Grimwood and Teresa, Chelsy and Cory Lueth of Salina; Skip and Michelle Coons of Shawnee; Victor and Sandy Wong of Junction City; Earl and Garrett Shafer of Spearville; and Mike and Janice Gaskill and Darrin, Sheri, Caleb and Ethan Bevis of Liberal. Also in for a tour were Nydea, Malia and Mark Leslie of Garden City; Randy, Pam and Kyle Doerksen, Gary and Sharon DeShazar and Darren and LuAnn Wicks of Hutchinson; and Larry and Phyllis Scherich of Wilmore.

Very truly yours,

Jerry